

DEQ Highlights Septic Maintenance Programs during SepticSmart Week

Each year, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) holds SepticSmart Week with outreach activities to encourage homeowners and communities to care for and maintain their septic systems. SepticSmart Week is September 19-23 in 2016.

Proper septic system use and routine care are vital to protecting public health, preserving our highly valued groundwater, lakes, streams and waterways, and avoiding costly repairs that can result from neglect. Septic systems treat wastewater from homes and businesses.

In Virginia, the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) provides a variety of funding sources to support residential septic maintenance, repair and installation. These DEQ programs include the Clean Water Financing and Assistance Program, implementation of the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act, and the Watershed Program. These programs are administered by DEQ, but are carried out at the local level by planning district commissions, soil and water conservation districts, local governments and a variety of non-profits. These locally led programs include tremendous support from the local Virginia Department of Health Districts.



Septic System Pump-out

DEQ's [Clean Water Financing and Assistance Program](#) provides loan funding for localities to create and manage a local revolving loan program for homeowners to repair or replace their malfunctioning and failing septic systems. These loans are low- to no-interest with flexible repayment terms so the locality can provide low-interest loans to their low and moderate income homeowners who wouldn't be able to afford to address these problems otherwise. Some local governments have been able to combine this funding source with other grant programs to be able to provide even better terms (including partial grants) to their homeowners. For fiscal year 2015, DEQ approved \$200,000 to be provided in septic program loans.

Since 1989, one of the many requirements of the [Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act](#) is a provision that on-site septic tanks must be pumped out every five years. The Bay Act applies to Tidewater (eastern) Virginia and is administered by 84 localities. For fiscal year 2015, Bay Act localities reported that a total of 17,828 septic systems were pumped across

Resources

If you live in the Middle Peninsula and need financial assistance to pump out or repair your septic system, see the Middle Peninsula Planning District Commission's [Septic Pump out web page](#) and [Onsite Repair Program web page](#).

Hanover County, Virginia, provides [important information about your septic tank](#) relevant to all Virginians living in Bay Act areas.

See EPA's web page specifically describing septic systems and SepticSmart Week <https://www.epa.gov/septic>.

Due to federal Section 319(h) funding administered by DEQ, the [Culpeper Soil and Water Conservation District \(SWCD\)](#), the [Northern Neck SWCD](#), the [Peter Francisco SWCD](#), and the [Piedmont SWCD](#) make cost share available in several counties for septic system maintenance in impaired watersheds that have a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) Implementation Plan. Cost share starts at 50 percent of approved costs, including pump-out, repairs, replacements and new systems or drain fields.

[Download the "Do Your Part, Be SepticSmart!" presentation \(PowerPoint\)](#) from EPA (13 pp, 2 MB) to learn how a septic system works, how to identify signs of a failing septic system, and for resources for how you can participate in SepticSmart week.

the Bay Act area, resulting in a reduction of 8,914 pounds of nitrogen. Many Bay Act localities also have educational information to encourage homeowners within their jurisdictions to pump out septic tanks.

Since 2005, the state has provided grant funding to localities and Planning District Commissions so they can provide financial assistance to low and moderate income property owners to pump out their septic tanks. During 2016, \$56,000 of this ongoing assistance enabled low and moderate income homeowners to pump out roughly 500 on-site septic tanks throughout Tidewater, Virginia. The pumping of these 500 septic tanks will result in the reduction of 250 pounds of nitrogen.

The DEQ [Watershed Program](#) works with organizations and localities across Virginia to fund projects that correct failing septic systems or straight pipes. Most of these projects are part of larger watershed restoration and implementation efforts to follow pollutant budgets, or total maximum daily loads (TMDLs). During fiscal year 2016, DEQ provided funding to pump out septic systems, repair or replace failing septic systems, or remove straight pipes from at least 344 homes using \$565,900 from federal Section 319(h) funding and landowner contributions. The grant funds were utilized in nine river basins throughout Virginia.



Septic System Repair



Residential Septic Management Program Advertisement Sign

An additional \$1.5 million is in the process of being awarded from the Watershed Program to provide Water Quality Improvement Fund assistance to four local entities for residential septic system management programs. The [Culpeper Soil and Water Conservation District](#), [Middle Peninsula Planning District Commission](#), [Thomas Jefferson Soil and Water Conservation District](#), and [Shenandoah Valley Soil and Water Conservation District](#) are the recipient entities.

To learn more, visit EPA's web page specifically describing septic systems and SepticSmart Week <https://www.epa.gov/septic>.